

Population boom expected to outstrip world food supply

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WASHINGTON — Massive food shortages will develop over the next 40 years as a population explosion gradually outstrips world food supply, researchers reported yesterday.

"Science and technology can no longer ensure a better future unless population growth slows quickly," said a report compiled by Worldwatch, an environmental research institute. "Food supply is the most immediate constraint on the earth's population-carrying capacity."

According to projections of current trends, the world's population could expand from today's 5.5 billion to up to 14 billion by 2050. The

biggest increases are expected in some of the poorest areas, such as Africa and southern Asia.

Worldwatch's "Full House" report predicted population would rise to 8.9 billion by 2030. At that level, the projected yearly grain supply will amount to 528 pounds per person, the report said. That's a quarter of what the average American uses now and just 20 percent above consumption in India, one of the world's poorer countries.

The U.N. Population Fund, responsible for family planning, last April unveiled a proposal to try to stabilize world population at 7.8 billion by 2050.

But food supplies will be too short to feed the world even if that goal is

reached, said Lester Brown, co-author of the Worldwatch study, which was prepared in anticipation of next month's U.N. Population Conference in Cairo, Egypt.

The institute told of failed attempts to increase rice production and fish catches in recent years — illustrating that new technology cannot be counted on for higher food output.

After decades of steady growth, world farm production will no longer be able to keep up with the rising demand, the study predicted.

However, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization believes output growth in the next 20 years will continue the high rates of the past three decades.